



Europe's New libraries Together In Transversal Learning Environments

Guideline 5
Evaluation

Ver: Final
Date: 8/09/09

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1. Current assessment

This guideline is the fifth of six guidelines concerning informal learning settings in libraries and their role in promoting lifelong learning and combating digital illiteracy and social exclusion. It has a specific focus on evaluation.

Public libraries, in common with libraries of all types, have a long-standing interest in measuring and evaluating their performance in achieving the core goals for which they are funded.

Numerous initiatives and considerable literature have developed and evolved in order to establish reliable 'performance indicators' for the individual services provided by public libraries or for the organisation as a whole. International organisations such as IFLA and Unesco have actively supported work in this area.

Performance measures are of potential interest to many stakeholders:

- Government, whose policy it may be to collect performance data;
- policy makers and funders, who want to know whether public libraries are effective in reaching their objectives;
- library service managers, who want to make the best possible use of the resources allocated to them;
- the public, both as customer and supporter
- advocates of public libraries;
- researchers acting on behalf of any or none of these groups.

Many of these stakeholders also have an interest in benchmarking. Benchmarking essentially means comparison with a view to improvement. Types of benchmarking include:

- Metric: statistical comparison using either existing published statistics or figures collected specially for the purpose
- Process: where libraries investigate how others achieve their results

Attempts have been made to establish benchmarking at national level for public libraries in the UK and in Germany. Benchmarking is a technique quite frequently used in a European context to enable comparisons between member states or regions over a wide variety of fields, including education.

The development of performance indicators requires access to robust statistics and data from which to derive them. The sustainability of a timely supply of data over time has been one of the major inhibitors of work in this area.

There are two relevant international standards, both of which have been revised comparatively recently:

ISO 2789:2003 provides guidance for the library and information services community on the collection and reporting of statistics for the purposes of international reporting, to ensure conformity between countries for those statistical measures that are frequently used by library managers but do not qualify for international reporting, to encourage good practice in the use of statistics for the management of library and information services, and to specify data provision required by ISO 11620.

http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/catalogue_ics/catalogue_detail_ics.htm?csnumber=28236&ICS1=01&ICS2=140&ICS3=20

ISO 11620:2008 specifies the requirements of a performance indicator for libraries and establishes a set of performance indicators to be used by libraries of all types. It also provides guidance on how to implement performance indicators in libraries where such performance indicators are not already in use. The list and descriptions of the performance indicators are also summarized.

It provides a terminology and concise definitions of the performance indicators as well as concise descriptions of the performance indicators and of the collection and the analysis of data needed. It is applicable to all types of libraries in all countries. However, not all performance indicators are applicable to all libraries. Limitations on the applicability of individual performance indicators are also listed for each performance indicator. It does not specify performance indicators for all services, activities, and uses of the resources of the library, either because such performance indicators had not been proposed and tested at the time of formulation of the standard or because they did not fulfil the criteria specified.

http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=37853

More recently attention has moved on from simply deriving performance indicators from input and output measurements, toward endeavours designed to assess the value or impact of public library services.

At this point, some definitions of some relevant terminology may be helpful.

- **Inputs** include all the resources that the organisation uses in order to produce whatever service or product it wants to produce. They include finance, buildings, staff, equipment, utilities, information and other content sources. Measurement usually consists of counting, though increasingly emphasis is shifting to measures of quality. It cannot necessarily be assumed that a better-resourced library is a better library.
- **Processes** are whatever is done to inputs to create something new. When we measure processes it is usually to see how well they are working. So a library may measure processing times for new books as a way of seeing if the process of making stock available quickly is working as well as it should.

- **Outputs** are the things that the organisation produces. Examples are 'book loans', 'information enquiries answered' and 'seats occupied by users'. Very often measurement consists of counting the number of outputs produced. However, the quality of provision will be as important as quantity.
- **Outcomes** are the short to medium term results of applying outputs. The number of borrowed books actually read might be an example of an outcome of book lending issuing.
- **Impact** is the effect of the outcomes on the environment – using the term very broadly to include people and society at large – and is usually long-term. An example here might be the growth in literacy as a result of reading library books.

A recent survey conducted by ENTITLE amongst 11 EU countries <http://www.entitlelll.eu/eng/Country-Surveys> highlighted that whilst nearly all of them collect national statistics on visits to libraries, only one (the UK) has developed a national framework to capture the learning and social outcomes of library (and museum) activities.

Often, the best way forward is to ask customers for their views and/or to observe their behaviour. Questionnaires are a market-research tool of great potential value to public libraries. They may be regarded as relatively high cost and they require skills in question formulation, selection of samples and processing which small public libraries may find challenging. By using a standardised questionnaire, costs are reduced and value added.

The ENTITLE survey does identify some evaluation projects that individual libraries have undertaken to capture the impact of particular initiatives. They capture information about usefulness of services and tend to concentrate on output measures (e.g., number of participants).

An important difficulty in measuring impact is that very many different factors contribute, so that isolating one (such as the library contribution) is very difficult. This is perhaps especially true of seeking to evaluate the contribution of public libraries to the learning of individuals. Moving towards a framework which may enable this is an important objective of the work of ENTITLE.

A further area of evaluation in which comparatively little work has been done concerns the extent to which libraries enable progression to other phases of learning and employment, for example by offering 'reskilling' activities in areas such as media and digital literacy, language learning, arts, stress and conflict management, preparation for job applications and interviews etc, thereby motivating people to look for new and better jobs, develop hobbies or just build new contacts.

The rapid emergence of services for learners which are delivered electronically and remotely via the Internet by public libraries also creates additional complexity for evaluation purposes.

Even where outcome measurement is able to show that learning has taken place, it is very difficult to reliably trace this back to library use. It is very challenging to isolate factors in order to establish causality in any evaluation, particularly in the case of informal, non-directed learning. It may only be possible at least to establish some logical and informed links between library activities and learning outcomes.

Many studies use co-relational approaches, looking, for example, at the links between service use and academic grades. This is problematic as there may be a number of unobserved, mediating variables and causality could indeed be reversed i.e. those who do well academically are more motivated to use libraries. This method also focuses only on one aspect of learning, that is: educational attainment among school children: other methods are needed to capture informal learning.

Libraries often hold data that is descriptive, anecdotal and personal, and many studies have used self-assessment as a measure i.e. asking people whether they feel that the library has improved their learning. The problem with this approach is subjectivity of user attribution. In fact many studies found that there was a significant disconnection between reports by students themselves, reports by teachers and actual academic success in terms of grades achieved. That being said, user perceptions can still be usefully triangulated with other points of view and other sources of evidence to create a comprehensive picture.

The Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) in the UK developed a detailed, multi-modal mechanism to capture and analyse information from a range of users using different methods, including comment cards, teacher surveys, questionnaires to students, exit surveys, etc. This has been used in several national studies and has been successful in capturing the 'whole picture' of the impact of specific projects as well as general service use.

Based on this work, ENTITLE has produced a step-by-step approach to conducting an evaluation based on the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLO) model. This model seeks to capture the key areas of learning that the library sector can feasibly deliver using its own unique strengths. The GLO also provides a comprehensive list of potential outcomes that libraries can realistically deliver for informal and formal learners. By using this list to define which outcomes we are trying to deliver, choosing appropriate indicators and evaluation methods, and triangulating findings from different sources, it is possible to create an informative story about how libraries impact on learning among their users.

The validity of this model for classifying learning has been reinforced by over 8 years' work in the United Kingdom, where the GLOs are now being used by hundreds of museums and libraries. This framework forms part of the funding agreement with larger museums in England, and is also being implemented in Scotland and Wales.

To estimate the *direct economic benefits* of library services (the indirect, or societal, benefits have proven even more elusive and difficult to measure), the following principal methods have been used: (1) "consumer surplus" and (2) "contingent valuation". The latter approach has been conducted from two different perspectives, (a) "willingness-to-pay" for services one does not yet have, and (b) "willingness to accept" compensation to give up services one already has¹.

Consumer surplus measures the value that consumers place on the consumption of a good or service in excess of what they must pay to get it. Although library services typically are "free," patrons do pay by the effort they exert and the time they spend to access those services. This time and effort represent an implicit price to the patron. Moreover, many alternatives to library services are sold in the marketplace. By comparing the number of books a patron borrows with the number of books he/she would buy at an established market price (as estimated by the patron's response to interview or survey questions), it is possible to calculate the value that library patrons place on borrowing materials above and beyond any cost of travelling to and the time involved in using the library. This value is a currency measure of the net benefits provided by the library's borrowing privileges. Such estimates can be made for each patron and each service used (e.g., reading newspapers, magazines and other reading materials; Internet connectivity; attending lectures and other library-sponsored events). The estimates can be summed to provide an estimate of total direct annual benefits measured in currency.

Contingent valuation measures, though controversial, have been used extensively, even in judicial proceedings, to value environmental conditions. Two alternative approaches are available. In the willingness-to-pay approach (WTP), the researcher asks respondents how much they would pay to have something that they currently do not have. In the willingness-to-accept approach (WTA), the researcher asks respondents how much they would accept to give up something that they already have. Generally, WTA estimates of benefits are higher than WTP estimates. WTA estimates are usually considered less reliable than WTP estimates. In applying contingent valuation analysis to libraries, library users (or the general public) can be asked how much they are willing to pay rather than forego library usage or, if libraries did not exist, how much they would be willing to pay (for example, in taxes) to enjoy the library privileges they have today. Alternatively, they can be asked how much they would accept to give up their library privileges or how much of a tax cut they would accept in exchange for closing all public libraries.

Each of these approaches has its strengths and weaknesses. Ideally all three approaches provide identical estimates of benefits. (Holt et al, 1999)

¹ paragraphs on pp. 7 ff were written by Peter Moock in connection with an ongoing MDR/NIDA study of the library and information sector in Namibia

The credibility of cost-benefit research depends on the extent to which the benefits of an investment can be assessed using an observable market 'numeraire' (a basic standard by which values are measured, such as gold in a monetary system). At one extreme, when a firm or a nation builds a hydroelectric dam and sells the electricity produced to industry and households at a price determined by the market, the valuation of the benefit stream is quite straightforward. With education investments, the valuation is less obvious, but the use of earnings differentials to measure market productivity (adjusted to net out the effect of factors other than education) and the use of efficiency gains (or "savings," e.g., the reduction in the cost of producing one student-year or one school graduate) are increasingly well established.

Asking library users "what-if" questions, on the other hand, about how many books they would purchase in the absence of lending libraries or how much they would be willing to pay for something they do not now have or be willing to accept for something is a suspect approach in the view of some economists, who would prefer to observe behaviour rather than ask people what-if questions. Library researchers often claim that their estimates of benefits understate the full benefits of public libraries because their studies do not take into account the indirect (societal) benefits. This is no doubt true, although caution needs to be exercised in that assessing libraries' direct benefits based on survey questions which could lead to inflated estimates since people who actually respond to a survey about library use are likely to be more enthusiastic about libraries than the average person and, therefore, willing to assign a higher value to their use. Moreover, for all respondents, talking about spending money is almost certainly a lot easier than spending money in reality. There is clear risk that work conducted on this basis may produce estimates of benefits which are little better than crude approximations/'guesstimates'.

Moreover, many library "return-on-investment" studies seem to ignore a fundamental dimension of most other cost-benefit research – the time dimension - and likewise not to take into account large up-front (capital) investment costs, such as constructing the building (and stocking the collection) and the 'time element' - that is the future stream of recurrent costs and benefits and to rely upon calculating the ratio of benefits to current costs in the latest available year.

2. Conclusions and Recommendations

Many European countries report use of outputs and inputs statistics to measure their work. However, they state that there are no national or general frameworks to measure the learning impact of library services.

There is a clear requirement for decision-makers and advocates to have access to reliable evidence as to why to support public libraries as an important component of the wider picture for delivery of Lifelong Learning.

ENTITLE is setting out a 7 step framework for acquiring some of this evidence and sharing the results using common indicators for Global Learning Outcomes (GLOs), using a multi-modal, tailored approach to data collection, where possible enabling libraries to use information from a number of different sources in their evidence base.

The steps should be viewed as a guide rather than a prescription for how the model can be applied and countries applying this should make their own decisions about which steps to use, which indicators are relevant and how rigorous the evaluation should be.

In addition to being a model for gathering evidence on learning, the GLOs are a useful performance management tool. The model encourages staff to develop learning activities in an outcomes-focussed manner.

The GLO framework can be used qualitatively (to code information on comment cards) and quantitatively (as a basis for questioning). Indicators can be developed or chosen on the basis of these sub-categories and how they may apply to the particular project or institution. The model can be applied to both users and non-users to capture real and potential impact. The framework is adaptable for the conducting of comparative studies in future at each of the levels described up to and including pan-European level.

The GLOs are a tool to help practitioners in libraries to:

- Analyse their services and articulate their impact on individuals and communities
- Improve approaches to evaluation e.g. designing questionnaires
- Draw conclusions from existing data e.g. surveys and comment cards
- Communicate with colleagues, funders, evaluators and policy-makers about the impact on learning in different ways
- Develop staff awareness of and practice in facilitating learning
- Design better learning experiences and spaces that inspire people to learn
- Reinforce for users the significance of their learning experiences.

3. Good Practice

Finland reports use of a Balanced Scorecard indicator around learning of information retrieval.

Denmark's relevant project evaluations can be found at the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media's website

<http://www.bibliotekogmedier.dk/nyheder/nyt-fra-biblioteksomraadet/artikel/nu-er-projektdata-basen-over-udviklingsprojekter-en-realitet-1/> and <http://udviklingspuljeprojekter.bibliotekogmedier.dk/>

The Agency recently launched a new website: a new element is the project database, which includes project descriptions, activities, participants, reports, evaluation etc. <http://udviklingspuljeprojekter.bibliotekogmedier.dk/projekt/book-en-bogbus-ny-med-borgerservice>

A study conducted in **Latvia** as the part of the impact assessment plan within the public library development project "Third Father's Son". The project is co-financed by the government of **Latvia** and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation within the Global Libraries program.

Praberza, Kristine and Ugne Rutkauskiene. Outcomes based measurement of public access computing in public libraries: comparative analysis of studies in **Latvia** and **Lithuania**.

http://www.isast.org/proceedingsQOQL2009/ABSTRACTS_PDF/Paberza_Rutkauskiene-Outcomes_based_measurement_of_public_access_computing_ABSTRACT-QOQL2009.pdf

An approach and framework and overview of methods used in impact focused research into Public Access Computing in public libraries applied in studies that were done within projects "Third Father's Son" in **Latvia** and "Libraries for Innovation" in **Lithuania** both supported by the Global Libraries program of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Portugal reports an increasing level of interest and support on evaluations to measure the impact of reading development and the role of libraries in this agenda www.planonacionaldeleitura.gov.pt.

The **UK** reports results from national research studies using GLOs. These studies have concentrated mainly on museums. But they confirm the applicability and usefulness of the GLO framework. <http://www.entitlelll.eu/eng/Assessment-Framework>

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Promoting the economic vitality of localities: Final version 090305:
http://www.mla.gov.uk/website/programmes/framework/framework_programmes/impact_measures

Public Libraries - A Wise Investment: Return on Investment for Public Libraries. Library Research Services, 2009. <http://www.lrs.org/public/roi/>

Website providing resources linking to a Final Report and 8 Individual Reports for participating libraries in the USA, together with study-related information and resources such as a 'Library ROI Calculator', related articles, compilation of results from similar studies in public libraries in the United States, articles and studies related to library value and a web page from the American Library Association detailing other studies and articles about Return on Investment

REDF. Social Return on Investment Approach: <http://www.redf.org/publications-sroi.htm>

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Streatfield, David. What is impact assessment and why is it important? http://www.isast.org/proceedingsQOML2009/ABSTRACTS_PDF/Streatfield-What_is_impact_assessment_and_why_is_it_important_ABSTRACT-QOML2009.pdf

This paper offers a definition of impact assessment and discusses some of the implications of this and other definitions. A particular approach to impact assessment is introduced, as developed for use in a variety of library and information service settings and the principles underpinning this approach are outlined. This approach has been adapted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Libraries Initiative when providing impact planning and assessment support to grantees through their 'IPA Road Map'. The approach was also adopted by IFLA in devising its impact assessment strategy for evaluation of its future Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) work. The importance of impact assessment in a variety of settings is outlined: from school libraries to university researcher support and from public libraries to electronic information services. Some 'unofficial' observations are offered on the relationships between impact assessment, advocacy and service sustainability, particularly in relation to major service development programmes such as the Global Libraries Initiative.

Wang, Mei-Yu, Ming-Jiu Hwang. The e-learning library: only warehouse of learning resources? (The Electronic Library.vol. 22.no.5. 2004. 408-415)